

The Oval

Volume 13
Issue 2 *Staff Issue*

Article 13

4-15-2020

I Took a Walk in Greenough Park Today

Rebekah Jenkins

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/oval>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Jenkins, Rebekah (2020) "I Took a Walk in Greenough Park Today," *The Oval*: Vol. 13 : Iss. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/oval/vol13/iss2/13>

This Prose is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Oval by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

I TOOK A WALK IN GREENOUGH PARK TODAY

Rebekah Jenkins

And I was able to forget about my general disdain of the winter months. When the end of November comes around, I'm unhappy all the time. There is no sun in Missoula, no warmth, no freedom of thought. Everything is just gray. Gray and windy. Cold and dreary. It always feels like the universe is conspiring against me to make me fail. Today felt like I took the first steps toward spring.

Although winter and I aren't close friends, I still wish there was more snow. Taking a walk and seeing the clear, paved trail next to the mountains of melting and dirty snow made my heart ache for our earth. And that may sound too corny or like a tree-hugger with too much time on her hands, but it's true. This winter has been too warm, last summer too cold. Is it even still winter? I swear it could be springtime. The light hits the endless bouquets of pine needles, greeting the ground in a golden halo. At least, it could be the *start* of springtime. But it doesn't make sense. February isn't spring. February is still cold. Maybe there isn't snow, but winter is still sitting on Her throne, trying to stay alive despite the rising temperatures and gaping holes in the ozone layer. She used to be more tough — had a little more fight in Her icy bones. But now you could blow a gentle spring breeze across Her frozen cheek: She gets knocked down and gives us the last few snowflakes that come from Her wispy white eyelashes.

But about the walk. I took my daughter with me. Alaska was so excited to not be in the car after three hours of delivering food. That's another thing; I hate my job. I don't hate the smiles on everyone's face when I ring the doorbell in pouring rain or knock-you-down-wind and pull out a brown bag you could stuff a small baby into; it's filled to the brim with plastic containers, plastic forks, plastic bags. All of this plastic; I hate how the word plastic sounds coming out of my mouth. I hate the way it looks on paper. Why is everything made with plastic? For convenience? At the cost of destroying our only home?

Anyway, I forgot how much I love to walk. There are steady inclines on the short trail that circles around and brings you back to the dirt parking lot across the street from pretty houses with chain link fences. A

wonderful slow ache starts at my ankle and travels up to my hamstrings, then my glutes. I can almost hear the blood starting to pound harder in my ears, my breath becoming more drawn in, more deliberate. I *love* to walk, but most days I am stuck for two to ten hours in my little Toyota Camry Hybrid, driving from one end of town to the other, waiting on calls, waiting on people's hunger and waiting on their laziness to take over, begging for plastic containers of Chinese, Mexican, and Greek food.

Alaska feels this physical connection stronger than I do. She runs almost the whole time.

Run. "Mom look at this stick!"

Stop. "Mom look at the big water!"

Look. "Mom look at this rock! 'Spretty cool, Mommy!"

She's amazed by the thousands of sticks emerging from the banks of the snow. She loves the tall trees that she *actually hugs* with her short arms wrapped around the trunk. She is wearing hot pink gloves I bought two weeks ago on clearance from Walmart. On that trip, I noticed that the women's bathing suits were already out on the floor, and I laughed to myself at the thought of wearing a bathing suit at the end of February. Swimming season? Now? It can't be. That's not how I remember it.

There are other things I love about the walk. A twig slices into my right ankle and I physically feel nature for the first time in months. It makes me smile to have skin exposed to open air. The water rushes by in a sound that makes me think of fresh spinach on a ceramic dinner plate. My shoes make a wonderful squelching sound as I intentionally step into a patch of mud. I can't explain these feelings, but the clearness I feel in my head and consequently my thoughts puts a childlike grin on my face. It's a wonderful feeling of freedom: being out here, on a Sunday afternoon, watching my daughter's excitement about being outside. I love sharing this moment with her. I love seeing her happiness when she is outside.

When I raise my foot, I look at the print that's left behind. *Adidas. Made in China.* My clothes say the same country. And it's the same everywhere. That's not what really bothers me. I haven't been patriotic or a 'proud American' for years now. What bothers me is the thought of underpaid workers making my shoes. And, the result that jet fuel has on our air when a plane is constantly going back and forth across the ocean. I ordered these shoes off Amazon (back before I stopped shopping on Amazon) and the amount of carbon I put out into the air from that seemingly harmless action upsets me.

When Alaska and I get back to the car, I walk slowly to hear the loose gravel slide under my muddy shoes. I want to pick up a handful of dirt

and bring it back with me. I don't know when we'll be out here again, and I know I'll miss it when I'm sitting in a basement classroom or delivering more plastic to people. Sadly, Alaska is ready to leave. Not because she hates it, she's just tired. I feel the same way, but she is tired of running. I am tired of thinking.

I think about what someone said a while back when Alaska and I arrive at the grocery store with four reusable bags: *It's not natural to have strawberries in December*. I look at the display of giant red strawberries and my face is blank. Alaska looks at them and her eyes get big.

"Oooh look Mommy! It's strawberries!" She begs for them, but I have my doubts about their identity.

When's the last time I had a *real* strawberry? Every single one of these is as big as my palm – sometimes bigger. Why would I want to eat that? The sweetness is gone. The flesh just tastes like that not-ready-yet green and white color. That's not a strawberry.

I push our cart forward, strawberry-less. Next, bread. In plastic. Then, breakfast sausage that Alaska loves eating on the weekends and the box is recyclable. But...sausage. The carbon from eating red meat makes me feel incredibly guilty. I throw it into the cart anyway, a grocery slave to a two-year-old. Yogurt. Plastic. Milk. Recyclable plastic. Fruit snacks. One cardboard box, 40 individual wrappers. Plastic. Everything is plastic. I'm overwhelmed and a little angry at myself for being a consumer even though it's the only way I can feed my kid and myself. Alaska loves all this food. She knows where we go to grab certain staples like pasta and milk and frozen breakfast and she reminds me that she likes it so that means I have to buy it. I also have to deliver food to pay off medical debt, student loans, not to mention I have to keep my hot water and electricity turned on. I have to—

I stop. I see the bags made from recycled water bottles in my cart. It's not donating over half my net worth to save the planet, but it's something. It's enough to calm me down and continue fulfilling Alaska's demands.

I took a walk in Greenough Park today. I mourned the lack of snow, celebrated the presence of sunlight, and spent time with my daughter. At the end of our walk, we bought groceries, and now, I put four reusable bags in my trunk filled with healthy, nutritious food that Alaska will love. When people say there isn't much we can do, I tell them how I've made many small changes over the course of a year. I have about nine reusable bags for grocery shopping. I am fortunate to have various recycling bins right by the dumpster in my neighborhood. I bought a water bottle

because I hated walking into the UC Market every day to buy a liter of Montana's Treasure water. The bottle is supposed to be compostable, but it still lives for a long time after just one use. When I was delivering food on a unusually chilly summer's day, my cloth pants ripped, and instead of throwing them away, I cut them to make four headbands/ head scarves and three accent place mats to put on my dresser and two book shelves. Redecorating with ripped pants: whatever I needed to do to keep those pants out of a landfill. I have glass Pyrex storage containers my mom bought (off Amazon; we're working on her leaving that abusive relationship) for my 20th birthday. It feels good to pack a lunch in one of those instead of a plastic sandwich bag.

The walk, even with the odd weather, was beautiful. The idea of shoveling blossoms instead of snow pains me, but there is still hope. I still have hope. As long as my daughter is a tree-hugging, trail-running, 'Look-at-this!' type of person, I will be doing everything I can to help my home — my planet — heal. I look in my rearview mirror to see her eyes start to droop. Admittedly, a run in the park along with pointing at all of the food in the grocery store can wear her out.

I am on borrowed time. This is *her* future I'm protecting. I don't want to leave her without a park to take her Sunday walks. I want to leave her with warm summers and cold winters, and real strawberries, just as it should be.